

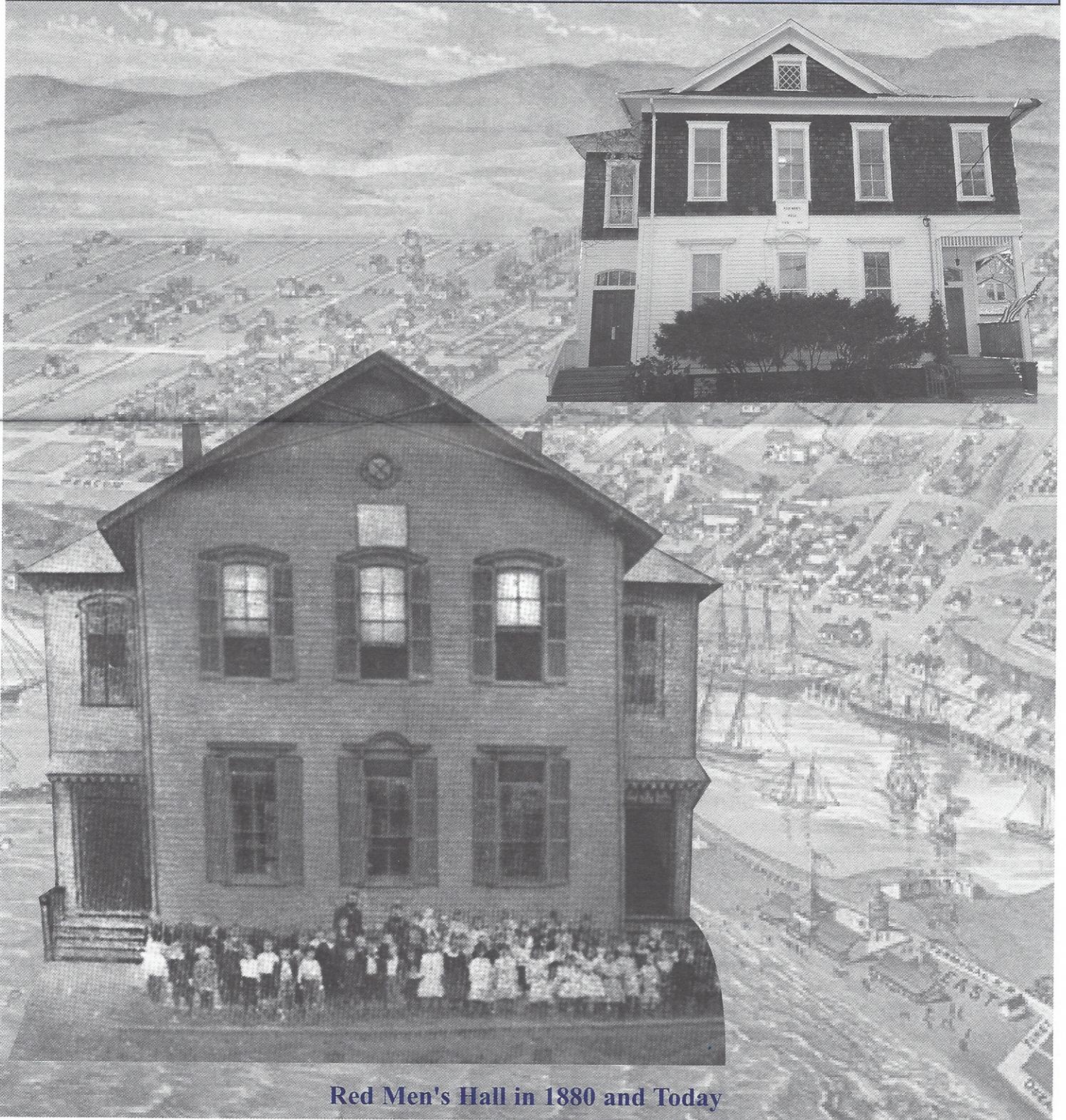
RUMSON

Borough Bulletin

SUMMER
2006

Settled in 1665

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Red Men's Hall in 1880 and Today

ALL ABOUT RUMSON

RED MEN'S HALL • 1 Church Street

If these walls could talk, what a tale they would give us. They would speak of school children and teachers, of being lifted from their foundation and moved to their present site, of an organization called The Improved Order of Red Men, of dances, antique shows and town meetings, of church services and of furniture being built and refinished. Originally built in 1879 across the street on the site of what is now Rogers Park, it was the first Lafayette Street School. There were about 75 students; the youngest had their classes in the lower level, while the older students met on the upper floor. In 1880, there was a principal, Mark Riley, and two teachers to educate the children. Mr. Gaskill was principal in the early 1890's; he strongly advocated for the new school building built in 1893 and served as its first principal. Other educators who taught in the school were: Miss Ware (later Mrs. George Bennett), Mary Coyle (1874), Mr. Dennison (1878) and Warren Reilly (1880). Families had to provide their own books and supplies, and some were handed down from generation to generation and not considered 'out of date' until they fell apart. To put that practice into perspective, it is interesting to know that the Rumson School District now reviews and considers replacing textbooks every five years. In the late 1800's, providing an eighth grade education was considered adequate, and those who graduated from Lafayette Street School had studied the three R's, geography, history, bookkeeping, natural philosophy (science), Latin and advanced mathematics. Any students who hoped to continue on to college were expected to transfer to a private academy in Red Bank or Freehold or to boarding school. The additional size of the 1893 school enabled Rumson to educate our students through ninth and tenth grades, a practice that did not change until the mid 1930's with the inception of Rumson High School. When the new brick school was begun in 1893, the wood frame building was auctioned off and sold to The Improved Order of Red Men for \$2,500. They moved it diagonally across the street to its present location at 1 Church Street.

Many Rumson residents may not be familiar with an organization called The Improved Order of Red Men, but we all must be aware of The Sons of Liberty, the group that threw the tea chests into Boston Harbor at the "Boston Tea Party" in 1773. The Sons of Liberty and several other similar groups flourished after the Revolution and joined together in 1813 to form the Society of Red Men. By the late 1800's, there were State Great Councils in 21 states and over 150,000 members. By the 1920's, they had tribes in 46 states and over a half million members. This patriotic organization continues to this day with the same ideals of freedom, friendship and charity. Although our local tribe disbanded by the early 1940's, three New Jersey tribes remain active in Egg Harbor, Northvale and Tuckerton, and tribes exist all over the USA with a headquarters and museum in Waco, Texas. (www.redmen.org) Contrary to a prevalent misconception, Indian forebears are not a requirement for membership in the organization.

Navarumsunk Tribe No. 148 was formed at a meeting that took place "over the Hose House" on July 23, 1892. They started out with 59 members. Some early members of the Red Men's were: Tunis C. Buckaloo, H. F. Harvey, owner of a hardware store in Sea Bright and first Chief of Records (secretary), Garrett Dangler, Stephan Stevens, a carpenter who worked on the Rumson High School construction, John B. Prichard, Levi B. Van Nest, Jr., Jacob Zerr and James P. Bruce. Coincidentally, in 1918, Jacob Zerr, L.B. Van Nest and James P. Bruce were members of the Board of Education, and Tunis C. Buckaloo was Treasurer of School Monies.

Those who look at the plaque on the building may wonder what the inscription C. S. D. 402 signifies. In actuality, at some point in the past hundred years, someone may have misread the old inscription when re-painting the building, because it is meant to be G.S.D, which stands for Great Sun of Discovery at 1491. In the tradition of the Red Men, their lodges are dated by the number of years since the year before Columbus discovered America. Thus, 402 plus 1491 equals 1893, the year that the Red Men began their nearly fifty year ownership of the building.

During their time in the building, the Red Men opened the hall for town meetings, dances and events. In 1923, the *Red Bank Register* reported that "a mass meeting of the voters was held in Red Men's Hall, complete with music and parade" to approve a proposal for having a collection of Monmouth County Library books placed in Oceanic Free Library. A referendum was necessary because a portion of Rumson property taxes would be used to compensate the County Library, a custom that continues to this day.

Jean Jordan attended Lafayette Street School at the time that the 'new' high school was under construction. She remembers being instructed to take all books home over Christmas in 1935 and then starting the year in the new Rumson High School. She also remembers walking across the street from Lafayette Street School for gym classes and music instruction in Red Men's Hall.

Long time residents remember boxing matches in the building's former gymnasium staged by Mickey Walker, a resident of Lafayette Street. Walker was a well-known professional boxer known as "The Toy Bulldog" who befriended many of the school's athletes, taught them to box and allowed them to run with him as he trained. One of the rationales explaining how we adopted our school colors and mascot connects to Mickey Walker, "The Tiny Bulldog", and the colors of purple and white that he wore when he boxed.

Dolores Ryan, resident of Church Street for well over 50 years, remembers that minstrel and variety shows were performed at Red Men's Hall. Her father, Frances X. Moynahan, was one of the performers who often did his act there. He was a one-man band so talented that he was able to tap dance while playing both the banjo and the harmonica. She also has recollections of Catholic Church services held in the building while Holy Rosary Church was under construction in the early 1920's.

When the History of Rumson was published by students and teachers of Rumson High School in 1944, the history of Red Men's Hall was included, and the building was described as empty and for sale. It was purchased by Frank Friscia, Sr. in 1949. Mr. Friscia came from a family of 16 children in New York City and attended school to become a pharmacist. He somehow changed his mind and switched to a wood carving school which gave him his career. He met his wife, Louise Bond, on the paddleboat that brought visitors to this area. She came from a family of 13 children, and her brother, Tommy Bond, and sister, Madeline Desmond, also settled in Rumson. When Frank Friscia, Sr. purchased Red Men's Hall, he brought his business there and created living quarters for his family, which had grown to 5 children, upstairs. He was an antique dealer who also built and refinished furniture. The building with the former gymnasium and stage was perfect for his business. On the stage floor are trap doors, and his family remembers that he stored the most valuable antiques in hiding places under those trap doors. Mr. Friscia was a talented craftsman whose expertise was in demand by the owners of Rumson's grand estates. He also worked on the construction of Rumson High School and built the beautiful doors on Holy Cross Church. His daughter, Jeanne Cuje, and son, Lenny Friscia, kindly shared vivid memories of their home. Mr. Friscia passed

away in 1970, and his estate sold the property to Helen McEachen and Bob Thatcher who resold it to the current owners, Donald and Janet Pitman, in 1972.

For over thirty years, Donald Pitman has used the stage and gymnasium as his antique furniture repair and refinishing shop, Once Removed. A few years after Donald opened the shop, the Pitmans created a New York style loft apartment upstairs. It is sleek and combines the charm of the tin walls and 12' ceilings with a most modern kitchen and bath. Recently, he retired and has spent innumerable hours cleaning out the shop and meticulously restoring the building. The magnificent decorative tin walls that are all through the building have been wire brushed and repainted. Original wood plank floors have been refinished, and decorative moldings have been restored. The building looks like a totally new structure. It is currently on the market for sale to a buyer who can see the irreplaceable value of this historical gem. The gym and stage create an inviting space that could be used as a very spacious and well lit gallery or antiques shop. Due to limited parking, the business that operates in the space must be considered "low impact professional use." Everyone who loves history and the heritage of Rumson owes a sincere 'thank you' to Don and Janet Pitman for rescuing, cherishing and restoring an integral part of the history of this community.